

Pinus flexilis

[Synonyms : *Apinus flexilis*]

LIMBER PINE is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to the Rocky Mountains (from south-western Canada to south-western United States) it has needle-like leaves and long, glossy yellowish-brown cones.

It is also known as *Biegsame Kiefer* (German), *Borovice ohebná* (Czech), Bull pine, Jack pine, Limbertwig pine, *Nevada-Kiefer* (German), Rocky Mountain pine, Rocky Mountain white pine, Western white pine, and White pine.

The flowers are pollinated by the wind. The heartwood (which smells of turpentine when freshly cut) can darken upon exposure to air.

Warning – prolonged contact with the fresh wood can cause dermatitis and allergic breathing problems.

The tree is protected in Nevada in the United States.

Flexilis is Latin (bent, flexible, pliant, supple) meaning ‘pliant, flexible or limber’.

Both the Montana Indian and some of the Apache North American tribes ate the small, darkly-mottled, brown nuts.

Navajo Indians made small ceremonial bows and arrows from this soft lightweight wood. Some of the Navajo tribe used the plant during ceremonial ritual in other ways – and their hunters smoked it to bring them good fortune before starting out on a hunt.

Some Navajo also used the plant to treat coughs and fever.

No doubt learning from local Indian tribes, early European settlers ate the nutritious oily seeds. These are said to taste delicious raw. They can also be ground for flour which can be used not only for bread and biscuits but also a soup thickener.

Rodents and birds (particularly some jays and nutcrackers) enjoy the seeds. Bears feed on caches of them made by small birds and mammals, while deer browse on the foliage.

Even though the tree grows very slowly it is sometimes cultivated as an ornamental, particularly for landscaping. (Some authorities believe it has a potential as a Christmas tree and could also thrive successfully in the hands of bonsai specialists.)

Locally the brownish to orange-yellow wood has been burnt as fuel – and it has also provided material for mine supports, railway sleepers, poles and boxes.